

COMMUNITY PROFILE – ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

Location

The City of Rockford is located along the Rock River in north central Illinois approximately 90 miles northwest of downtown Chicago and 17 miles south of the Wisconsin border. Rockford is the third largest city in the State of Illinois with a population of 152,871 (2010 Census Bureau estimate). The Rockford, Illinois Metropolitan Statistical Area, which consists of Winnebago, Boone, and Ogle Counties in Illinois, has an estimated population of 402,928 (2010). The City presently encompasses an area of approximately 61.81 square miles, up from 41 square miles in 1980.

History

New England settlers who valued the waterpower of the Rock River founded Rockford. The early village was called Midway because of its location halfway between Galena and Chicago. In 1837, the town became Rockford, named for a shallow place in the river with a rocky bottom where Indian and settlers once crossed. In 1839, it was incorporated as a town and selected as the County seat and by 1852, the town had become a city. Though Rockford's original settlers were from New England, a large Swedish population began settling in Rockford in the early 1850's bringing with them craftsman skills in woodworking and metals. This led to Rockford's first big industry, the furniture industry. A large percentage of the present population in Rockford is of Swedish descent while many other ethnic groups have become permanent members of the Rockford community in the last century.

Other important industries in Rockford before World War I included knitting and farm implements. By the 1920's, many of the industries turned to the production of metal products such as tools, hardware, dies, and fixtures for larger companies. These industries eventually overtook Rockford's traditional industries as the backbone of its economy and proved to be particularly important during World War II. To this day, the local economy is heavily reliant on metal fabrication industries.

Rockford Today

Rockford is the industrial and business hub of the Rock River Valley as well as North Central and Northwestern Illinois. Located just 65 miles northwest of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport and 90 miles east of the Mississippi River, its location allows for easy access to regional, national, and international markets. The economy is still based largely in manufacturing and is the largest fastener product producer (screw, nuts, and bolts) in the United States. Rockford is also one of the largest machine tool centers in the world. Furniture, hardware, farm implements, automobile parts, aviation and space instruments and machinery are among the more than 300 types of products made in Rockford.

City of Rockford

The City of Rockford has a mayor-aldermanic form of government that provides citizens with police, fire, building regulation, community development, human services, public library, water, and public works services. Rockford also serves as the seat of Winnebago County. In 1992, Rockford was one of ten communities nationwide designated as an "All-American City" in the annual competition administered by the National Civic League. The designation is awarded to cities that promote public-private partnerships to improve economic conditions and quality of life at the local level. In 1997, Entrepreneur magazine and Dun & Bradstreet ranked Rockford number four in the best cities for starting and running a small business in the mid-sized city category. In 2004, the City of Rockford received the Sports Illustrated 50th Anniversary Sportstown Award for Illinois (only one city per state was chosen). This award is presented to the City that provides a

variety of sporting events and also encourages residents to play sports. In 2005, Rockford was designated as a winner for the America In Bloom award for the population category 100,001 –300,000. This award represents recognition by a national campaign and contest that promotes enhancing communities through beautification. Known as the “Forest City”, Rockford prides itself on its beautiful tree-lined streets and neighborhoods as well as more than 4,900 acres of parkland.

Rockford blends the best of big city living with valuable small town assets. Families enjoy year-round ice skating and fair weather water sports, miles of bike and jogging paths, and some of the most imaginative playgrounds around.

The Arts

The historic Coronado Theatre was restored and opened for a variety of shows, which include plays and concerts. Built in the 1920's, the Coronado has presented top-notch performers on its stage for over seventy years. This project is designed to preserve, rehabilitate, and expand the theatre thereby preserving an important part of the City's history and maintaining it as a major downtown performing arts entertainment venue.

The City is also home to many unique art galleries and museums. The Rockford Art Museum, Storefront Cinema, the Discovery Center, and the Burpee Museum of Natural History are museums located on North Main Street, just north of downtown Rockford. Jane the Nanotyrannus makes her home at the Burpee Museum. Rockford is also home to Midway Village and Museum, the Ethnic Heritage Museum, Tinker Swiss Cottage Museum, Erlander Home Museum, and the Graham-Ginestra House.

Other artistic endeavors in the City include the premiere stage theatre in town, the Rockford Dance Company, Charlotte's Web for the Performing Arts and the Rockford Symphony Orchestra.

Recreation

The Rockford Park District serves a 125 square mile area in Winnebago County including virtually the entire City. The District offers an extensive array of physical facilities and recreational programs. The District has 4,552 acres of parks, playgrounds, and facilities which include: five public golf courses; two indoor ice arenas including a twin-rink ice arena in downtown Rockford; four outdoor swimming/recreation centers; the Magic Waters Theme Park; a children's farm; four local museums; a Trolley station and Museum; an excursion boat; a 14-mile snowmobile trail through adjacent parks; and a greenhouse, garden, lagoon, and arboretum complex on the Rock River. In the early 1980's the District constructed a regional activity center called the Sportscore which contains eight lighted slow pitch ball diamonds, twenty soccer fields, playgrounds, bike and jogging paths, sand volleyball courts, boat ramp, three concession buildings, restroom facilities, and a parking lot for 800 vehicles. The Sportscore site totals 105 acres of which 50 acres were purchased and donated to the District by a local industrial concern. The Park District also has Sportscore II, which consists of a multi-purpose park on 124.2 acres. This facility has twenty additional soccer fields and a two mile jogging path.

The recreational facilities of the Rockford Park District are supplemented by those of the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District and the State of Illinois through its State Parks. The Forest Preserve District has 5,388 acres in 31 forest preserves ranging in size from 2 to 948 acres. In addition to campgrounds, picnic areas, shelter houses, conservation areas, and the fishing areas on spring fed lakes, the Forest Preserve District has three 18-hole golf courses.

Festivals

The Rockford area offers many wonderful annual festivals throughout the year that feature art, music, dance, cultural heritage, and of course food. Here is a list of just a few of these annual events:

St. Patrick's Day Celebration: On or about March 17th in Downtown Rockford. Parade followed by a party featuring traditional music, dance, and food.

Ethnic Music Festival: First Sunday in June at the Ethnic Heritage Museum, 1129 S. Main Street in Rockford. Song, dance, and food by ethnic groups which originally settled Rockford.

Juneteenth: June 19 at the Sinnissippi Park Music Shell in Rockford. Celebrate African-American Independence Day with music, entertainment, talent show, art exhibit, food, and more.

Midsommer Fest: On or about the summer solstice in mid-June at Erlander Home Museum in Rockford. Traditional Swedish celebration of the longest day of summer.

Fourth of July Fireworks: A Rockford favorite as downtown is illuminated with fireworks to celebrate our nations independence.

Celtic Fest: Enjoy the thrill of being Irish, Scottish, or Welsh at the annual Celtic Fest. The Fest features two stages with continuous music, dancing, a re-enactment village, ethnic food and drink bagpiping, and other fun activities.

Festa Italiana: Weekend celebration the first weekend in August at Boylan High School in Rockford. Celebration of Rockford's Italian heritage with food, rides, games, music, dancing, and cultural displays.

Polish Fest: Third Sunday in August at St. Stanislaus Church in Rockford. Celebration of region's Polish heritage with food, music, crafts, dancing, cultural exhibits, and rides.

Booker Fest: Second or third weekend in August. Gospel and folk music, food, fun, and children's activities at the Booker Washington Community Center in Rockford.

Climate

The climate in Rockford is typical for the upper Midwest. Rockford has four distinct seasons, each of which brings special pleasures. Average temperatures range from January's average high of 26.6 degrees and low of 9.8 degrees Fahrenheit, to July's average high of 83.8 degrees and average low of 62.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Average precipitation for the year is 36.28 inches with June having the highest average of 4.52 inches. As for snowfall, on average the City receives approximately 36.5 inches of snow each year with December being the highest average snow month with 9.8 inches. Since 1951 the highest temperature recorded was 104 degree Fahrenheit on August 16, 1988 while the lowest temperature recorded was minus 27 degrees Fahrenheit on January 31, 1989.